



Meditate & Mediate

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Thomas: Well, thank you, Hilorie and Sherry. Hello, everybody, and hello, William. Happy we are back together here, online. Yeah, as always, I think it's good to just have a short recap of what we did last time in order to make a connection to this course session.

Recap of the Last Session

As you remember last time, we said we took the principle of going to the balcony and said going to the balcony already needs the inner freedom to at all remember that there is a balcony. How often are we caught up in arguments or conflicts and we do not remember? We stay arguing, we stay being reactive, we stay kind of being in our rightness and wrongness and projections.

We said it needs already a certain level of development to at all be able to go to the balcony, and there's also something that I would love to ask William later on, but let's just look at the qualities that we practice inside to establish witnessing consciousness and to have the capacity to be more and more of our time kind of on the balcony and be able to witness our internal processes as we go along, and if we feel that that's not possible in the situation, so we take kind of a time out to reflect on the situation and to digest one's own inner reactivity or processes and reconnect again—in order to be able to enter negotiation, the conflicts resolution, or our own conflict that we are going through more creatively.

Then we said that it needs a lot of personal development, and that often the reason for us becoming reactive in the first place is that the current situation triggers all the trauma layers in us and that whenever a situation becomes difficult, most probably my nervous system and my past are kind of participating, in a way, in the situation that is hard for me, which means that I carry over a lot of past into the given moment, and that past overshadows my experience of now. We said that presence, the quality of presence is that I can participate in the current experience kind of from a free inner space, so that I really meet the moment now.

Then we also talked a little bit about the concept of karma in the far East—or the trauma as we know it nowadays in the contemporary language—is, in a way, kind of an energy that is unresolved, undigested, unintegrated, and it creates repetitive patterns that play out again and again and again because it is an intelligent function, like it's a screaming for a healing. It's a screaming for a detox, for an integration, for a psychological and physical and biological cleansing.

I believe and I think that it's going to be very helpful to create a cultural reframing so that weaknesses, difficulties, dysfunctions, in my understanding, are kind of misunderstood childhood heroes, which means these are regulation functions that we needed in former times, in our whole childhood and upbringing, that we put certain functions into place that now might look like a limitation, but then they were very intelligent regulation functions.

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I think, the more we explore them in ourselves, the more we learn to listen to those regulation functions and ways how energy works in us and the pathways that we created in order to cope and deal with our environment, as kids, better, the more we will find, first of all, a positive attitude towards those mechanisms in us, we will love to connect to them and re-own them and, through re-owning, we can kind of grow them up and enjoy their fruits and their pearls that they hold inside.

Practices for Dealing with Difficult Situations

Before I have a question for you, William, I want to come back to some of the practices because it seems like that we all know already that many of the things that we talk about here, they might sound like concepts or theory, often, but in fact that they are all deep practices and that they flower and become alive in us through daily practice, like implementing those practices and carry them throughout everyday life. With this, we begin to embody certain functions so that when we are really in situations that are more difficult, there are sprouts growing that support us to deal with those situations.

We said a few practices, one was to develop inner body competence because my body is not only my body, because my body is kind of a whole superintelligent nervous system, it's a biocomputer, it's life collecting information for hundreds of thousands of years—and everything sits here. And the more I inhabit and I use the capacities of this body-mind, the more I will live a happy life and I will be able to deal with more and more situations in my life.

One practice, we said, is the synchronization of the physical, emotional, and mental experience, a lot of introspection in order to learn about my internal landscape, to learn to use the messages of my internal landscape, to re-experience, maybe, again—in certain areas it might work, in other areas it might work less—that I have an internal GPS that, from a healthy self-contact, the connectedness within myself, I get orientation. I'm grounded, and I have an inner sense that helps me to navigate through life.

That's a very precious asset. That's a very precious function. Many of you know how it feels when we want to take a decision, when we are looking where to go in our life and which kind of crossroads or path to take, that there is an intuitive connected sense in our heart that helps us to take those decisions not just from a rational point of view but from a holistic point of view. That's very important. Many of those qualities start with our body. It starts with embodiment, the emotional health, the synchronization inside.

And then we said that when we listen to each other, that we listen to each other as if our body had eyes all over. That I don't listen to you just with my mind, I listen to you with my whole body like a music instrument. It's kind of I resonate with life, with society, with institutions, with people, with situations, with nature. There's a kind of resonance body, and that resonance body is highly intelligent.

Then we talked about stillness meditation. We talked about taking time every day to create a window where we do not do the same thing that we do the rest of the day. There's a window when we just dedicate time to listen. If it's 10 minutes, 20 minutes, 1 hour, 2 hours or more, we learn to sit in silence and just witness, watch. Start with attunement—we recorded already multiple meditations that are helpful as a guidance—many of us do already have a strong meditation practice.

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If every day has a window, when we look through many days, we see a corridor. That's the air-conditioning system of our life. That's where fresh air comes in. Through space, inspiration comes in. Through space, higher insight comes in. Through space, new possibilities come in. That spaciousness... we all know, when life gets really tight and we are really feeling, we have the feeling we are caught up in life, it's tense and it seems like a struggle, then when we can open ourselves again and when we listen and we relax our nervous system, we ground ourselves—suddenly there's more space.

And when there's more space, there's William's balcony, and that's not just good for conflicts, as we said multiple times and also William said multiple times, but that's very important as more and more continuous function in our life, in many life situations, because it is also hosting, in a way, our inner GPS, our inner compass.

Then, maybe, one more thing: we said also, for practitioners like us, that we live in the marketplace, which means we have to live a path of embodiment. Spirit embodies itself through us, which means that inspiration, innovation and the potential future, potentiality becomes real through us because we have insights and we make those insights real and we manifest them as our world.

Now, because we are not sitting in 24-hours meditation somewhere in a cave but we are connected to people, we are connected to culture, we are living in families and workplaces, so we have to learn to use the daily triggers as our teaching. That means, we suggested already earlier in this course, to keep a diary, to make notes. Whenever I run into a difficult team meeting, a difficult situation with my intimate partner, with certain situations that I experience throughout the day, or when I drive my car and I get a tantrum because the traffic is stuck, whatever it is, it's a moment to make a note—not, maybe, while I drive the car, but afterwards—I make myself a note and I remember that in my evening contemplation, before I go to sleep, I revisit at least some of the moments and I look at them. When I have more space, when I have more of the balcony with me, I can revisit moments, even if they are not intense conflict mediations or conflicts that I participate, even if it's situations that I experience as difficult, I mark them and I know that I kind of met my teacher in that moment because something happens that I cannot digest and respond to that moment according to my intelligence.

These are just a few, it's kind of a summary of some of the practices that we suggested so far. I think many of them together create a very coherent practice for people like us, that might be very busy, that might have many things on their schedules, a very rich and complex life, and a deep practice within all of it.

Cultivating a Space of Awakened Engagement

Then, this leads me to a question that came in that I would love to forward right away to William. William, the question that came in, as you know, is one that says, in a way, how much is the balcony connected to dissociation and overwhelm? Do I need to go to the balcony only when I'm overwhelmed? And so, does it indicate that I find the current situation difficult? Maybe, you can share a little bit from your perspective, I think, it's good if we start with this question that somebody wrote.

William: It's a pleasure to join all of you again. Really, a real pleasure. It's a pleasure to be with you, Thomas, and to listen to the wisdom and the practical wisdom of all these practices, and it reminds me that the last thing you said about how we can use the daily triggers as our teacher. In a larger sense, I think, we can use the conflicts in our lives and the conflicts in which we are third parties as our teacher. That really conflict, the practice of mediation, is a life practice. It's the rich material that, if we can use it correctly, can help us in our process of awakening.

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As I kind of reflect on this course, and we're in the midpoint of the course, we said in the beginning that space we're trying to cultivate is a space of awakened engagement. It's easy to be in the space of unawakened, unengaged with the world. And sometimes we're engaged with the world but we're not quite awake. We're activists but we're kind of burned out. Or we can be awake but not engaged. In this *Meditate and Mediate* course, we are looking at the bridge between these two. If meditation is the process of awakening and mediation is the process of engagement, we're trying to kind of figure out what is that space where you have both, where we can cultivate increasingly our abilities to engage in an awakened way or to be awake in an engaged way.

That brings me to the question, which is the balcony. Is the balcony something that we just go to when we need it because we're overwhelmed or reactive and we need to go to the balcony? Or is a place that we live from? I believe it's the latter. In the ideal situation, we live from the balcony. We're constantly moving, living between the balcony and the stage. The stage is a stage of life where we have our conflicts, where we get engaged. The balcony is the place of awakening.

There's a constant flow back and forth between balcony and stage, balcony and stage, it's so fast that we don't even... we think of them as going on simultaneously.

To me, the balcony is not just a resort, a kind of last resort: when we feel overwhelmed, let's go to the balcony, it's a refuge. It *is* a refuge, and we need to use it that way, but ultimately it's a place that we live from every instance of our lives.

Thomas: Beautiful. Yes, I very much agree with this. When we talk about—I mentioned this before a little bit—when we talk about the moments that the balcony becomes at all a possibility, because very often it seems like, okay, that we have the capacity to say, “Okay, hold on a moment. Let's stop for a moment. Let's come back.” This needs already a certain kind of awareness in myself, that I have that moment of, “Wow, I'm engaged in a conflict.” I've become and I'm totally reactive, where I start projecting and I'm, like, *in*. Then there is a moment where I become aware that actually I'm repeating my past and then acting my past within the current conflict.

I would be interested, in your experience, William, what is that moment? Because it seems to me that that moment is a real blessing, but how can we strengthen that moment to happen more often? Because it seems like we have many conflicts on this planet because that moment doesn't happen. Because it seems like that moment saves us, in a way, into a new possibility. Once I have that awakened part of me kick in, there is already an awakening, but what induces that moment?

William: Yeah. That's a really good question. Because how can you go to the balcony if you don't know that you're not on the balcony?

Thomas: That's right.

William: If you're in such a reactive state that you don't even know that you're in a reactive state, what can you do?

I think, the practices that you listed before, which are kind of daily practices... Actually, if we sit down for a moment of silence once a day, or maybe we do it once an hour for even a minute or 30 seconds, if I tune into my system... Let's imagine, I'm in a conflict and I have a five-minute break, or I don't even have that, I'm in the middle of the room, if I can just take 10 seconds and just feel my body, you mentioned, just listen to my body, I realize I'm in a reactive state, and at that moment, then, I could take measures.

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I think I've mentioned a conversation once, as an example, where I was having a rather tempestuous conversation with the president of Venezuela, Hugo Chavez, and he was shouting at me, and I just pinched the palm of my hand. There was a moment, if I just go back to it, where I kind of realized, wow, I'm... I just took a second, really, just to kind of listen to my body and realize there was numbness or there was dissociation, or whatever, and then remembered to pinch the palm of my hand. By pinching the palm of my hand, that just brought a kind of a little momentary pain, and I kept pinching the palm of my hand because I realized that I needed to feel my body, to feel a little bit even of pain in my body just to connect me there so that I could really stay with myself and stay with him, construct that bridge that you talk about, between the inner and the outer, of how can I stay with my experience, listen to myself, and at the same time listen to him and his anger.

By being able to kind of be on that bridge there, as you recall in that story, he shouted for, maybe, half an hour, but because I was just listening and not reacting and not saying what I felt like saying, biting my tongue as it were, then he didn't have something to keep on feeding the fuel of his anger, and he was known to go on for eight hours or 10 hours, but after half an hour, just watching again his body and his body language, his shoulders sank, and in a kind of weary tone of voice he said to me, "So, William, what should I do?" That's the opening right there. There was enough space there. There was a space in me which somehow created a little bit of space in him to ask me a question. From that, then, a new, we could have... in fact, that actually gave me the opportunity to say, "Mr. President, I believe the entire country of Venezuela needs to go to the balcony." Because I've used that metaphor with him before. It was almost Christmas, we needed a truce, a tregua, kind of... Let everyone enjoy Christmas, give everyone a breather, a cooling off of the conflict, and then come back in January, in a better mood, to really listen and engage in a conflict once again, in a more constructive way.

Thomas: Right. Beautiful. What I hear is that pinching your palm, like the remembering of feeling oneself and feeling the other, it seems to be a very important ingredient. I'm very curious, because in the kind of science of awakening or in the awakening process, it seems that there's always a moment where the new stage of self is being born.

Like when I'm identified with one part of me and I'm living in that reality and suddenly, and I'm sure many of us on the line know this, that suddenly there's a pop, and I'm aware of more than I was aware before, just a second before.

Just even pinching your palm is an act that needs a certain consciousness that needed to be established prior to this conversation, otherwise it wouldn't have worked out. I think that's very interesting. What supports us as humans or as humanity to have that strengthened, that moment that is already awake, even if not fully, that is already awake to a new possibility that is different than what we might have done before.

That's why I think that to ask, very often to ask the question... I mean, we raise children since hundreds of thousands of years, we solve conflicts since hundreds of thousands of years, by now we should know how to do it. And still, we don't.

What is the part that raises the question? What is the part that blinds the eyes or that numbs the hearts? And what is the part that seem to be merciful or graceful or goes through like a pressure of evolution to wake something new up? I think, that moment, that's a crucial question.

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And I think for every one of us it's a crucial question: what brought those moments in our life? And to contemplate on the moments of awakening that we had already, what is the common quality in those moments—and even to share it in the triad work—what is, in moments where something new has been born, and to find out what that moment of transcendence is, what is the nature of that, if that's, at all, possible. I'm very curious.

Collective Balcony: A Loving Circle Around World Conflicts

Then I'm curious how you look at the fact that, okay, there is my personal practice and my, as you said, you had some inner practice before, and that laid the groundwork for you being able to pinch your palm. Then, what is the collective, what is the we-space practice that we can do to strengthen each other's wakeful moments as a coherence in a larger community. What are your takes on the community aspect of cultivating awakening?

William: Well, I believe that's what we're doing right now, on this very call, right now, with everyone around the world here, we're creating a kind of a we-space, we're training ourselves collectively. And to me, that was always the hope of this course, that it would be the beginning of a glimpse, an experiment, really, not just a course, but a kind of a collective experiment in which we could sit with this question of how do we take these collective traumas, these large collective traumas that threaten humanity, that threaten our future, that threaten our children's future. Situations like the ongoing situation in North Korea that I've referred too many times because I feel it's kind of the most immediate existential threat to the collective human body.

I believe that these are the tools we need to develop, which is, in addition to the personal tools that have been honed in generations, thousands of years of meditators, and there've been personal practices, and I believe, at this point in the evolution of humanity, we need to learn how to learn these collective practices, how we can create a collective space, or how we can treat the collective traumas even as the third side, as you were talking about before with me.

How can we feed our individual practices into the larger whole, so that we can sit closest to the fiercest fires that are going on now, where there's most hatred, and most animosity, and most peril, and most danger? How can we collectively witness that without dissociating? How can we be on a collective balcony, not just an individual balcony but a collective balcony, and pool our presence, our witnessing, our individual practices, but pool it into a collective practice that allows us to sit as an embracing circle, a loving embrace of the most intense conflicts on the planet today, give them a loving embrace and, within that loving embrace, kind of create a crucible, like an alchemist crucible in which the lead of human anger and animosity and hatred can be turned into the gold of compassion and love and kindness. That's the alchemist miracle that we could create together if we pooled and joined together as global social witnesses, in your words, Thomas.

Thomas: Yeah, right. When I listened to this, it brings me to two other things that come to me. One is, last time on the call I said that I believe that trauma and collective trauma is like a foggy landscape, and that you don't see stuff coming towards you 300, whatever, feet or yards away but you see it when it appears 10 feet or yards in front of you, and it's harder to respond to it because it looks like it's coming unexpectedly. But I believe many of those situations that we are much more sensitive and that we also have a much higher capacity to sense into the future than we display at the moment.

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The future seems to be like a foggy nothing, and then the past seems to be kind of a heavy stone that we sometimes drag with us. Both of it, I believe, clouds our presence right here. There is one aspect that training, again, the sensitivity of our nervous system, becoming aware of the reduced functionality and function is, I believe, enables us, for example, to feel—which I would love to do later on in the meditation, again.—that we feel that all of us sitting on the line right now, that we can have an immediate, felt connection with everybody on the line. That that's the capacity that we have, the interconnectedness of all of us is much more real as a felt experience than it might appear, often.

I think in a practice community, in a community of mutual interest and practice, that's actually a very powerful quality, that the more we can literally feel—not just imagine that there are now, whatever, hundreds of people on the line, but that we really get a felt sense that that's really so, and that our nervous systems are much finer than it seems, and distance is way less important than it often seems.

I think at the moment technology, like now, helps us that when I see you, William, so then I can feel you and you can feel me. Then if people come online and ask questions, we can—but they are still thousands of miles away. What's the difference? We just see each other's image, we see each other's face, but I believe this is kind of a bridge, technology is a bridge to show us the functions that in the mystical writings were displayed since thousands of years.

The Positive No Is Saying Yes to Our Core Needs

But before we get to that, I was interested, when you talked about the crucible melting the lead of human hatred, I wonder also, in your experience, just the situation that you mentioned before, how do you feel that own development of power or aggression or the will in myself is crucial in order to be able to meet, to be present in, let's say, more aggressive or kind of conflicted, heated up environments? How much do we need to be grounded in our own capacity to say yes and no, which is often a possibility for us to... Like sometimes to really be clear and say no is a function of an integrated strength. I need to have a certain amount of ground in myself to also say no. We talked a lot about getting to yes but I'm also interested, and I know that you mentioned in one of your former calls, also the power of saying no skillfully. Maybe, we can go there.

But I'm interested also how you see this in yourself, that your own power is needed in order to stand in a situation where somebody screams at you and you can still be present. I think that's also a very important part, that we talk about aggression and anger in ourselves, and then ultimately power. Maybe I hand it over, but that's I think very interesting.

William: Really. That's true. We use the metaphor or the prophecy of the Shambhala warrior, that we're called to become Shambhala warriors who are endowed with compassion, which comes from the heart, and insight, which comes from the third eye, that insight into the interconnectedness, that serene view.

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And it feels to me that there's a third weapon of the warrior, which you were calling that place of power from which aggression comes or whatever, but I would call it a kind of a place, in its divine aspect, it's a power that comes from the earth, that strength, and I think we're given that so much, a quality that shows up in conflict and in the most difficult conflicts that we face in our family lives or in our communities or in the world at large. We do need to engage it, and to me the word of power is no. No is the word of power.

No may be the most destructive word in the world, in a sense of behind every war, behind a reactive violence, a reactive abuse, every kind of act, it's a message of no in some sense. But to me, if we can learn to use that power, that aggressive power, that energy, that no, it can become the word of transformation. What we're called upon in these times, I'm looking at some of the questions that came across and the situations that people have brought and I'm looking at the situations in the world today. I woke up this morning I was reflecting on all the sexual abuses, for example, that are showing up now in the collective sphere, or the situations of war and human suffering—to me, those situations call out for a no. As mediators and as meditators, we tend to focus more on the word yes and how we help people get to yes. To me, we also need the word no in today's world, and we need to learn how to integrate yes and no. I think it was Pythagoras who once said the two simplest words in any language are yes and no, and therefore they are the most difficult.

I almost feel like even psychologically, when we as infants, as children, we learn to use the word no. The age at which children really learn to use the word no is around two. In English, sometimes we stigmatize that, we call that “the terrible twos” because it drives their parents crazy because the child says no to this and no to this and no to that. But psychologists will tell us that that’s an extremely important developmental phase where the child is individuating, the child is learning to become its own identity, “I don’t want this. I want...” It’s an expression of will.

Since parents don’t like to hear the word no and then teachers don’t like to hear the word no, and then partners don’t like to hear the word no, and bosses don’t like to hear the word no, what happens is it’s almost like we have two arms. We have a yes arm and a no arm. The yes arm gets well-developed because everyone likes to hear the word yes from us, that muscle gets developed. But the no arm doesn’t get so well-developed because it gets suppressed or stigmatized.

A lot of us have difficulty, if you think about yourself for a moment, think about your own experience, how many of us have difficulty saying no, particularly to people who we love or people who are in authority. There’s a whole issue, I know that was a theme in many of the questions around power and how do you deal with people who have more power than you? How do you say no to someone who is in power and maybe abusing that power? How do you say no in those situations? It’s either we have an undeveloped muscle and we don’t know how to say no and we say yes when we wish we could be saying no—or the opposite, we say no in a very kind of angry way that, of course, destroys the relationship. And my question is, is there a conscious no? Is there a... even I would call it a holy no? Is there, what might be—because no is often seen as negative—but is there a positive no that we can develop that draws upon our power and that’s integrated with our deeper yeses?

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It’s a whole question of power. One of the biggest obstacles I find in our ability to mediate our own conflicts and the conflicts of others is the ability to say no. The classic mistakes are: we, as I was just mentioning, we say yes. How many of you, if you think about it for a moment, how many of you can think of situations where you wanted to say no and you said yes? That’s a classic mistake we all make.

Or we do say no, but we say no in a very destructive way that destroys the possibility of an agreement, that weakens or strains the relationship. How many of us can think of situations where we've done that? Or we neither say yes nor we say no and we just simply avoid the issue?

We kind of fall into what I think of, I think I may have referred to it as the 3A trap: we avoid, we accommodate, in other words we say yes when we want to say no, or we attack and we say no destructively. The question is, how can we engage in an aware way, in a conscious way? What's the possibility there?

Challenge: How to Negotiate with **POWER?**

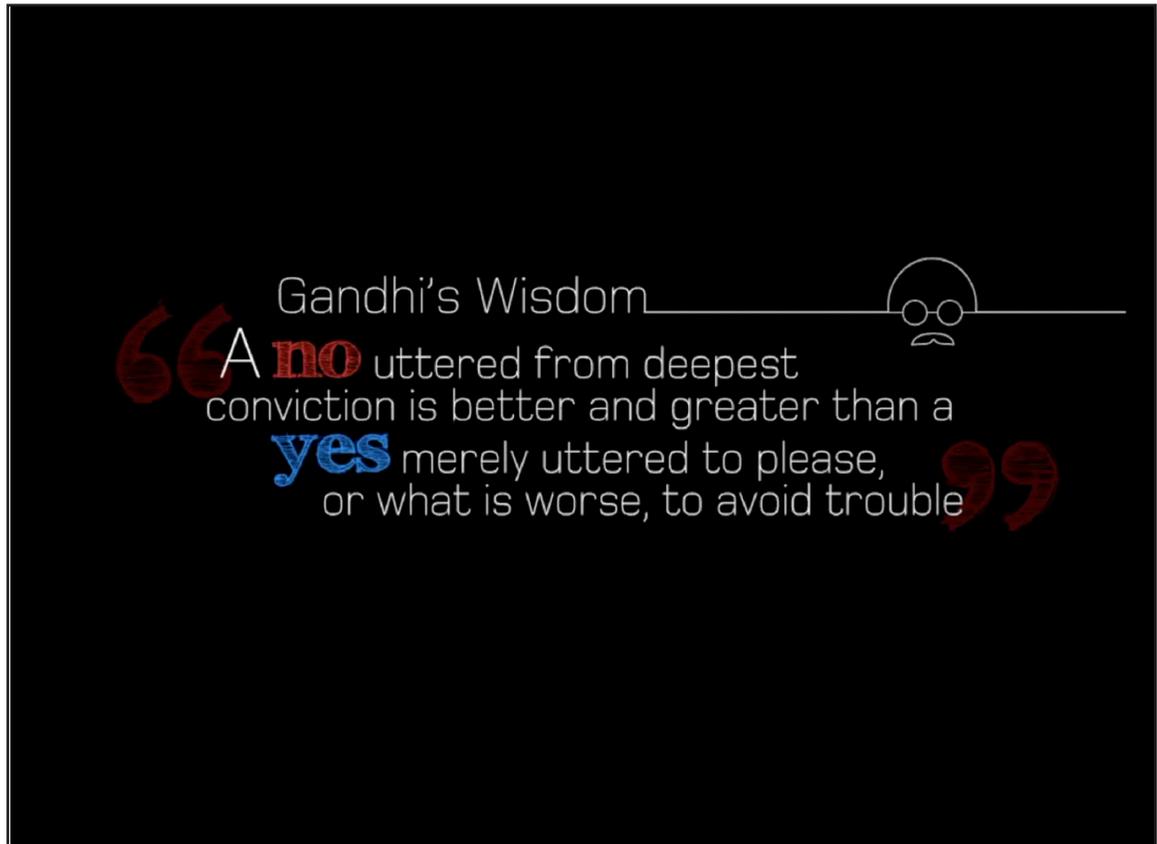
Big obstacle: inability to say **no**

Classic mistakes: **!** Say **Yes** when you want to say **No**
Say **No** destructively
Avoid issue

Slide 1

I think Gandhi, actually... if you think about it, his whole strategy of nonviolence or Satyagraha was about wielding the word no in a positive way. He put it this way, he said that, "The no that is uttered from deepest conviction," in other words, from a deeper yes inside, "is better and greater than a yes which is merely uttered to please or, what is worse, to avoid trouble."

I think a lot of us, particularly drawn to this field, it's so easy to fall into the disease to please. I'd look at it myself. I'm trying to please the other or to avoid trouble when in fact these conflict situations, these situations of today require us to engage, engage with power, engage skillfully, but to engage with our noes.



Slide 2

And what I found the secret is, if you could imagine a tree for a moment and think about, to me, what is a positive no? A positive no is a little bit like a tree. It starts with the roots of the tree, which is the yes, and then actually I would even encourage you, as you listen to me, to think about some situation where you would like to say no, some situation, maybe it's a conflict situation, imagine someone you want to say no to. The first question is to start with the roots of the tree, which is a yes. A positive no actually starts with a yes, a yes to what you're trying to protect, the sacred value you're trying to protect.

When I'm working on war, I'm not just saying no to war, I'm saying yes to life. Yes to life—because war destroys life. What is the yes in the holy shoe of the sexual abuse? There is a yes to human dignity. What is that yes inside of yourself? Because a positive no actually is just another way of saying yes. But what is that yes? What is that deepest why inside you? We have to discover what that root is.

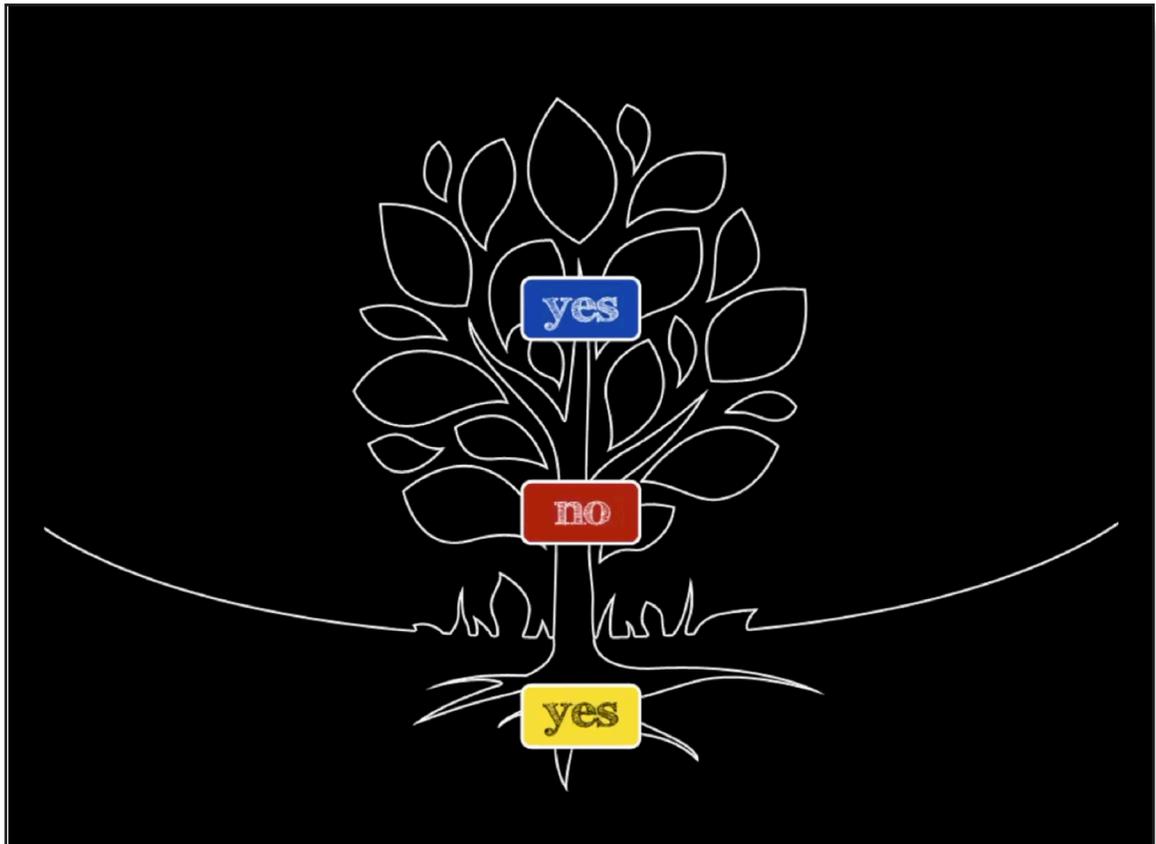
Then comes the trunk of the tree which is the no. The trunk is the strongest part of the tree. That no then comes out of our yes, which is a no to suffering, a no to an act of abuse, a no to an act of injustice. It's a no, but the quality of that no often is, it's a powerful no but it's a respectful no. It can be a calm no, it can be a quiet no, but it's strong. You're drawing a boundary and saying, "This will not happen," or, "I do not accept this."

What that no, if you think about it, the power of that no comes from the power of something that we discussed earlier, which is your BATNA, your best alternative to a negotiated agreement, your source of power. Your outer BATNA, your inner BATNA that you will take care of yourself, it's grounded in that. It's not just a no, it's a no based on power that you're not going to accept this and you have an alternative.

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Then, out of the trunk of the tree, comes the yes. That's the flowering of the tree that's on the other side of the no. It's a yes. A yes to how you want the situation to be. A yes to the kind of relationship you want to have. It's a no to certain behavior or it's a no to a demand. Then there's a yes to, okay, an alternative. What is it that will satisfy and protect the underlying needs in that roots?

The first yes is a yes to your needs, to what you're trying to preserve, to what you're trying to protect, the values, the dignity. The no is to a particular behavior or injustice or wrong situation. And the yes on the other side is what's your proposal. What would you like to see? What is the relationship you'd like to have? What is an agreement that would meet your underlying needs?



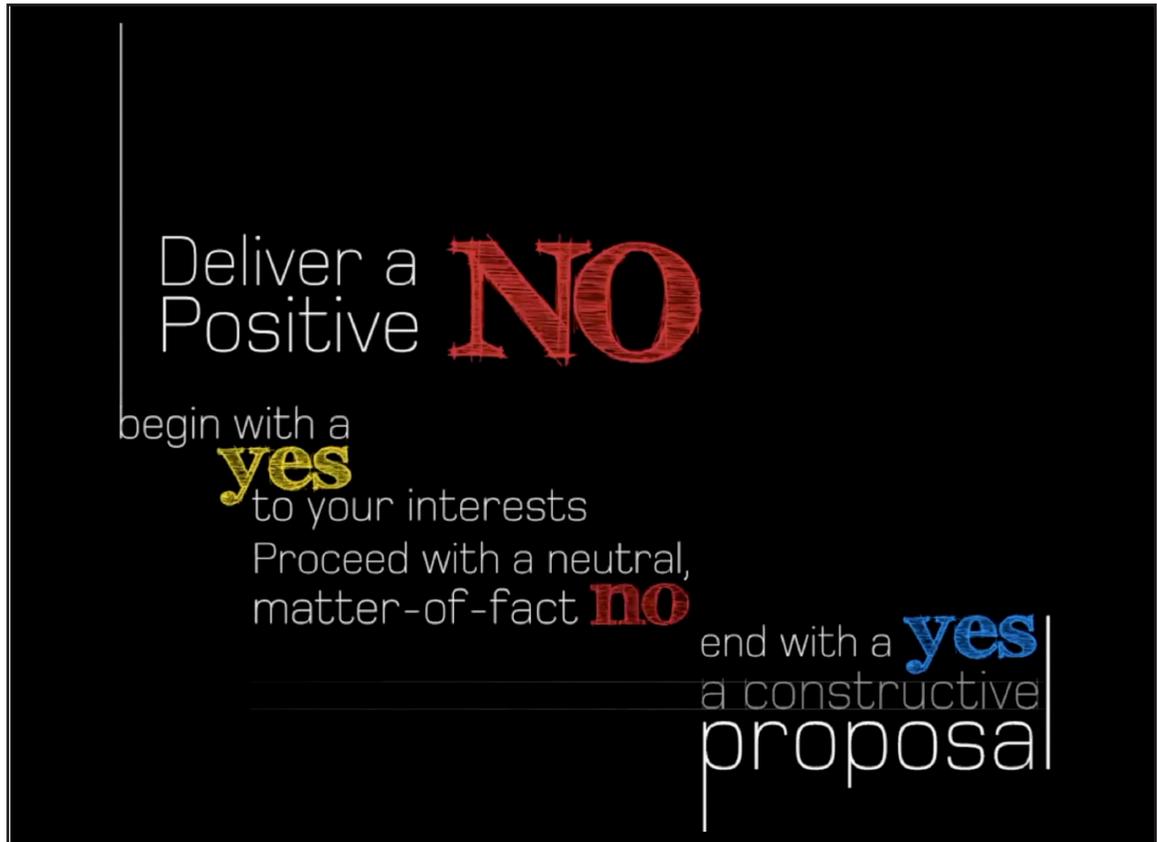
Slide 3

To me, what is our yes-no-yes? What is our yes-no-yes? It's like a sandwich in which the no is in the middle between two yeses. Think about no—even sometimes I find it very useful to even take my situation and say, put it in a single sentence, because I or we and for the collective things, stand for, need, no. We need life. We need dignity. We need—whatever the strong value is there. I say no to violence, to war, to abuse, to injustice, to whatever that you're saying no to. I therefore propose that we engage in negotiation. There's something at the other end of it that had yes. I find that the yes-no-yes is a kind of practical simple tool for me. It helps me integrate the no with the yes in a practical way when applied to conflicts.



Slide 4

We want to deliver a positive no which begins with a yes to our interests, proceed with a neutral, matter-of-fact no—it's not a destructive no, it's a respectful no, but it's powerful—and it ends with a yes, which is a constructive proposal.



Slide 5

I think, in some ways, the great challenge that faces us today is to rescue the word no and rehabilitate it. Rehabilitate it in its most positive, in its most conscious, in its most loving, in its most powerful, in its holiest way, as a kind of holy no that integrates yes and no and therefore, as Shambhala warriors, if we can wield the yes, reaching out to the other, the yes of connection, with the no of protection, if we can unite connection and protection, then I think we have the tools, then, to deal with the conflicts in our own lives and the conflicts in the world.

Thomas: Wow. Great. Maybe, I would just underline that I believe the constructive no that you are talking about is a no that I can say in relation to the other. Like when you said before that you could feel yourself as you were listening to the President so that there was a connection, and what I hear, also, is that the respectful no is a no that is connected.

I think in the way how I look at human development, I also underline what you said before, because at the beginning there are stages in our development where we have to say yes, that to be protected is more important than to have one's own autonomy. So when I'm in this phase of my development when I'm hurt, I will often say yes in order to please the other, which means actually I say yes in order to stay safe. That's something, I believe, that many of us need to explore in ourselves. Do I say yes in order to be protected in myself?

Then there's the next part, when we say no as a resistance, as kids, and the kids say, no, no, I don't come back, I don't come back, I don't do this, I don't do that, what an important phase it is to create the strong ground in us. I think, if we were supported in that phase, then it crystallized, that no can become a choice to say no.

Because the other step is either I'm in fear and I'm codependent, and then I will always try to please the other in order to stay safe, to be happy myself, but then the next phase is that I say no because I have no other choice, because that seems to save my autonomy. This no I have to say, it seems like I need to protect my freedom through resistance, and that when I know in myself that resistance is actually my fake freedom, then I will constantly find myself in situations that will create friction, but not the friction... they will not create intimacy, after all, so they will stay in the distance. Only when I really move through these two phases and I come to a choice to say yes or no freely, I can say yes and I can say no, then it's out of relation with the world. I think that's very beautiful how you said it, like also the framework, so what do I need, what is my need. That implies already that I feel what I need and that I'm not too scared to feel what I need. That's why I would say, I don't know what I need.

Yeah, so I think it's a very important conversation.

William: Yeah. If I can just take a timely example just today I read in the newspaper, because I know a number of the questions earlier on referred to the wave of sexual abuses that is emerging. Today, in the newspaper, there was the full statement of an Olympic medalist you may know, Aly Raisman, she was testifying at the trial of a doctor who abused her and many other young gymnasts, his name is Larry Nassar.

Her statement was so powerful, and it really was... it's an archetypical example, to me, of a positive no. It's a no, but it's a no so beautiful, so eloquently, so pointedly delivered, a no to this abuse, but what you can hear through her words is the underlying yes to life, to dignity, to humanity, to kindness. Then there's a yes, that's the first yes, and then you hear the yes on the other side, that she's very clear of laying out what needs to happen, to change, so that these abuses don't happen again. There's a constructive proposal because the thing about no is, to me, a constructive no doesn't end with the word no. It then leads to a yes to the world we want to live in, to the relationship we want to have.

That's the key, that's the bridge. A positive no starts with a yes and ends with a yes, and in between is that very powerful no that we need to cultivate, that comes from that place of power inside of us that we need to bring into the difficult conflictual situations that we all face.

Thomas: Right. Maybe, to add that it's also interesting to look into ourselves and learn to feel, and when you said before that everybody can pick a situation why do I sometimes say yes when I want to say no or why do I sometimes not dare to say no, so that even if this seems like a weakness or like something dysfunctional, but to really look at... I think for many people, the early attachment process hasn't been that kind of supportive so that we have enough earth inside of ourselves that a no has a ground to push back from or to have a counterforce.

If I don't have that, I will often say yes, but actually then I regret and then I get angry in myself that I didn't say no. I think, maybe that's also a good practice for the triads or for one's own, or maybe we can go into a short meditation to look what actually happens, what do I need when I want to say no but actually I'm saying yes? What do I need—or maybe I will find out that often I don't even feel myself and what I need and that's why I don't even come to the no because I don't have the power there.

[00:55:00]

Or, the other side is that I often say no but it's also a way how I take resistance, mistakenly, for power. I think, for some people, the opposite is true, so that when I resist, I feel powerful, but actually I'm locked in distance. These two polarities are very, very interesting.

William: That's absolutely it. That's why I like the image of the tree, as we have to look into the roots, the roots of our tree. What is our deepest yes? For that, it requires listening to our body, really. Really listening to the roots of what is our body telling us and what is our deepest need.

No, to me... In the Vedic tradition, there are these, the three divine forces, the gods, Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. To me, no actually... Brahma is the force of creation, and no is, to me, necessary for creation because in today's life there are so many distractions that I find, if I'm going to write a book, I have to say no to a thousand things. No is the word of focus, we need it to create.

No is also the word of preservation. No is the word of protection of all that is holy, that is valuable. We need the word no as the word of protection. No is also the keyword of transformation of Shiva. No is the keyword of change. I really believe that we need, all of us, each of us would find it very worthwhile to do a deep study in ourselves of the word no, of the way in which we misuse that power, as you were saying, for resistance and so on, that's disconnected, or the way in which we suppress that power inside of ourselves and we try to please, we try to accommodate.

We all have learning edges around no. And I feel that in today's world, if we can each do that study, each daily practice we can strive to strengthen that muscle, if we take as a daily practice that today I will say at least three positive nos. I'll say no to—it might even be no to yourself, no to some addictive tendency inside yourself, if I say no to my tendency to look at too much email or whatever, no to social media—but it's a positive no. To practice, to exercise that muscle, so that we have a strong no arm and a strong yes arm and then, I think, we're equipped to deal with the challenges of today.

Thomas: Right. Also, to look, when I say no from a disconnected place in me, like so what do I say to in my experience that the no comes out in the disconnected way and what is that powerful no that you said that can stay connected. Because I can experience you, I can say no to you, but in connection to you. If I cannot experience the situation with you, so then I actually say no, but I don't say no to you, I say no to the intensity in myself. That's beautiful. That's a great practice, to practice our no muscle.

William: It's a sacred practice.

Thomas: Yeah. Yeah. Maybe, let's have a short guided meditation, and then maybe we can move over to the Q&A part. Is that okay for you, William?

William: Yes, please, I would love that.

Thomas: I mean, we walked through a lot of impulses today so far. Again, as we said already throughout other sessions here, there's space, there's energy, and there's structure, there is space and information, and space is the capacity to digest the information that we absorb.

[01:00:00]

Begin Meditation

Let's say, we take a few minutes and we just absorb what we heard so far. Maybe, especially focused on the capacity to choose, like I believe the choice that we have in life is to say yes or no. Choice is a function of maturity. When I'm grown up, part of my grownup capacity is that I don't have to grab life because I'm afraid, I don't have to resist life because I need to find my own autonomy, but I'm grounded in myself, and that's why I have a choice, and that choice is to say yes or no in every moment.

When we take these into presence, many things that William mentioned, and I take this and I take a breath and I feel my body and I allow myself to drop into my body deeper. Not to forget that the body is full of wisdom, full of knowing, it's a very intelligent biocomputer connected to hundreds of thousands of years of human experience, and more.

I let myself feel my body as I exhale, exhale ripples out and takes me deeper into body awareness. Also into the beauty of and the simplicity of sitting, just sitting here and breathing, and feeling, and having space-time to digest, and feeling my whole body, down into my feet, my whole body representation, my whole nervous system that tells me about the state of my body.

I'm still breathing and allowing my exhale to take me deeper into the body, into the richness of my interior landscape.

Let's say, your whole body, now that there is more space and connection to the body, the body is like the resonance body of a guitar or a music instrument. Let the music of the word yes resonate within my whole body. Many situations when I say yes, the yes has music in my body.

[01:05:00]

How does a yes feel when it ripples through my body? Is yes powerful? Does it feel a bit weaker? Does it feel based on fear? Overly attached? Does it feel free and alive and freely chosen? How does the yes kind of unfold in my body? Which areas of my body feel energized and creative and strong in the yes? Or are there areas where I feel weakened when I say yes, or where I feel that yes is riding on fear or lack of protection, safety, lack of ground.

Can the yes ripple down all the way through my body, into the ground? Do I feel it in all my body or is part of my body numb? When I listen to the sound of yes, yes, my whole nervous system is in resonance with that word.

Does yes feel like a free choice or an obligation? Is it free or dependent? Is it standing on ground or hanging in the air? When I say it in my imagination, does the word leave my mouth and travel into the world? Or do I keep the word, often, in my own energy, in my own sphere? My yes doesn't even meet the world, really.

Do I allow the yes to be a real yes or do I often say it with hesitation? Do I often say it within my own sphere? Can people trust my yes because I mean it? Does it energize my body? I just listen to what actually happens right now, as I do that in my body.

Then I take a breath, I exhale, and let the sound of yes go. Then I listen to the sound of no and I listen precisely to my body as I do that and I let the word no resonate in my body. How do I feel? Do I feel expanded, I feel tight, I feel held or expressive? Do I feel connected or disconnected? Do I have a ground? Is the earth in me? Is the air in the ground, like a whole? Am I hanging in the air? Which areas in my body do I feel when I say no, when I listen to no resonate in my whole body field? No.

[01:10:00]

Like an echo through a castle, which parts of my body are alive and strong and present? Which parts of my body are numb or pulled back or closed? Or full of joy, strong, vibrant? When I say no, do I look... is the energy of my face facing the world? Or am I facing somewhere else? Can my eyes look at the other when I say no or are my eyes protected? Is my heart connected to the world or protected?

Do I say no with my voice, and the no can travel into the world? Or do I hold the no back? Or do I push it into the world because I'm afraid of the consequences?

Again, just listen to what your body tells you. The body knows all of that. You just need to let the word no resonate in the body. Listen to the atmosphere, to the quality in your body when you say no.

Then also, slowly, to take, again, a breath and let the no slowly disappear in your imagination and listening, let the body free itself again.

Then, before we finish, let's see if you find one situation in your reflection of the last days—today, yesterday, the day before yesterday—where you felt an internal conflict in saying yes or no. Or you felt more tight and didn't really know how to say yes or no. You maybe felt that the situation left you with the disturbance.

Let's revisit that situation for a moment, with the presence and the collective presencing right now. When you tune in with yourself and the situation as a whole, maybe there is more to see, more to feel.

[01:15:00]

Maybe, through tuning in in a deeper way, the more authentic, the more relevant, or the need that hasn't been fully felt in the situation can be surfaced where the more authentic yes or no could come more to the surface. Maybe, also to feel what's underneath and hesitation. What kind of unmet need is underlying the struggle?

Then, slowly, let's go of the situation and enjoy for a moment that we have the capacity for inner space. In a way, you're standing right now in the balcony, witnessing—yes, no, the situation—and having enough space to do that and being connected to a community of people, there are hundreds of us doing it at the same time, witnessing, creating a field of we-presence, reinforcing presence, clarity, awakening, or consciousness, insight, so that even we are very far apart, the mutual intention connects us. That's a tangible field.

And then let's take a couple of deeper breaths and feel your body, let's let go of the field attunement, come back to your own body, your own feelings, and sense of yourself sitting, your feet on the ground, breathing, and slowly opening your eyes.

End of Meditation

Is there anything from your side, William, that you want to either share should we move over to the Q&A section?

[01:20:00]

William:

I just want to say how beautiful that was, Thomas, really beautiful illustration, to me, a demonstration of the power of inner space to take the things that we were talking about, this divine dance of yes or no, and really study it within our bodies, in that beautiful way that you let us through, and then to make use of that inner space to study some situation that we're involved in. I find it a very powerful methodology that I and each of us can use as we seek to navigate the intense situations of life that are presenting themselves at this moment at all levels, from the micro to the macro. Gratitude. My thanks to you, really beautiful, beautiful meditation, and on with the questions.

Q&A: The Sacred Marriage of Yes and No Gives Birth to the Future

Host: We have a lot of written in questions, and one of them was very interesting and opened up to many of the others. Somebody asked, it feels like a positive no allows for spaciousness that new possibilities can enter the we-space, and looking at opening up to the future and to the we through the ability to say no. That kind of edge that people are touching on. That came through a lot of different questions, so, if it's clear. Yeah.

William: Yeah, it's very clear. It's very beautiful, actually. It's very powerful. That's exactly it. To me, that yes to the future, that listening to the future that Thomas talks about, that yes to the field of possibility is that yes on the other side of no. There's a quote. Let me just see if I can just find it for a second here because there's a line of poetry that I think captures that. Let me just see that.

Yeah, there it is, right there. "After the final no comes a yes and upon that the future world depends," from Wallace Stevens. "After the final no comes a yes and upon that yes, the future world depends."



Slide 6

To me, that's the question is, that yes, that possibility, it's the fruit of a no. It's a fruit of a no. That no is the no that we need in today's world to engage with conflicts. We need that no, that no that comes from a deeper yes inside of ourselves, from the deepest values, from our deepest place, from presence, from the balcony, from the prize within, from the heart. From love comes a no, a no of power that allows us to engage in the world. Then, from that no, comes the tree, the branches, the fruit, the flowers of the tree, comes the future world, the possibilities. I think that's exactly it. That's exactly what a positive no does, it's a creative no. The positive no is actually a yes in disguise, actually. That's the real secret.

In our field, if yes is the keyword of peace and no is the keyword of justice, then the marriage of yes—and that's what we need, we need to re-consecrate the marriage of these two in order to give birth to the children, which is the future possibilities of the world.

Thomas: One thing that comes to mind is also that when we... like the art or the way of the mystic or the way of wisdom, I believe, is that we constantly have a space inside that is free, that is spacious, and that can listen to inspiration or intuition. Which means that, as long as I am completely involved in my experience, there's very little space, so I'm kind of a prisoner of the face of the time.

[01:25:00]

The more I practice inner openness and spaciousness in listening, like non-dissociative listening, so then I hear more and more the whisper, which means the future, the potentiality, the potential of tomorrow usually has a quieter voice than the noise of the world of today.

Wisdom is also to cultivate a sense of inner listening so that I can hear what I call the whisper, the voice that whispers gently within the noisy world. And I'm part of the noisy world, because if my mind is very noisy, so I don't hear that voice, I don't hear that whisper. If my emotions are in the turmoil, I don't hear that whisper, often.

To cultivate the space that I'm constantly receiving—I'm within a conversation, I'm within a lecture, I'm within, whatever, driving the car—and there's one part that is gently listening. In order to be able to receive drops of inspiration, and I don't know when they are coming, so that's why I need to be here, I need to listen to that whisper. Sometimes, we know that we wake up and we know that a certain part in our life is done.

Suddenly, we know. One day we wake up and say, okay, this job, this situation, this, whatever, relation, something is done. It's clear. Then, the truthfulness to the future also often implies that, at a certain time, we will be able to say a mature no to something in order to open up a space. Like as when William said, if somebody wants to write a book, maybe I need to say no to many other things in order to have time, but if I feel that that's the next whisper, that's my inspiration, then, if I'm not able to say no, so I will delay that process, I will delay evolution.

I think that that's very true, how to listen, and sometimes also having the courage to say, okay, I'd change a certain part of my life even if that creates uncertainty because I'm certain of a new inspiration that comes in that also needs the capacity to say yes and no.

Q&A: Fear Is an Emotion of Connection

Participant 1: Hello. I'm aware, as I come forth, I feel very uncomfortable. It's like I'm coming forth for my human family, which is, by association, so much like my own family where no was not ever allowed. I want to go slow enough that I can stay inside my body. I'm pinching my hand right now so that I can stay present. I want to see if I can stay with the we-ness as I talk. I'm going to go slow enough if I could do that.

Because of my own background in my family around trauma, it's very difficult for me even to think about saying no. There's a way, a level on which I dissociate. If I go up to the balcony, I bring all the baggage of judgment with me. No and yes are associated with what's good, what's bad, what's true, what's false, what's right, what's wrong, even in the balcony.

And so as I was listening to you, I thought, wow, what if there's another balcony? Another floor? Another balcony, two or three floors up? So I went up there and I realized, ah, I look at the tree, and the bottom, the roots of the tree are the needs, the core needs that we all have in common. The no and the yes are both about which strategies—the no and the yes above ground—which strategies would best meet those needs? If I say my no just simply, without judgment, and just simply whether something that's happening or something that's been proposed, is this going to meet my needs or not? That is an ultimate no of dignity. If I have judgment of the other person, that's what creates the further conflict, because we pick that up in our nervous systems even if we don't say them.

[01:30:00]

Marshall Rosenberg so clearly describes the difference between what's a need and what's a strategy. I think, for myself, learning the difference between the two, I've learned that so many of those things that I thought I needed are strategies, and then that's what also created a lot of confusion.

If I know what I need and then look at the strategies—without the judgment, just what's meeting my need or not—and then listen to the other person about what's meeting their need or not, then we can get to the place of, well, no, this doesn't meet my need, so let's look at something else, and how about this? Then the other person says, no, that doesn't meet my need, let's look at something else. It goes until finally, oh, the final no gets said, and then there's a yes because it meets both of our needs.

I wanted to share that. Then the other thing I wanted to share is actually an answer, a response to a question that Thomas proposed, which was, well, how can we refine or strengthen those that—I forget the question—those moments of transcendence and our awareness of them so that we can realize more when we have dissociated. My first meditation teacher suggested driving meditation. When I drive, to this day, after 10 years or 20 years, actually, of doing this, I meditate when I drive, so that every time I realize I've just dissociated—because driving is the most wonderful place to learn, to become aware of when we dissociate because we do it all the time. We're not really present, and then we are, and we realize it like, wow, where have I been?

Oh, I lost my train of thought, and I lost the we-space as well, so I'll go back. Maybe I'll let that one go. I'll just say that it is a wonderful place to become aware of when I dissociate. Then, when I would become aware, I would thank God, oh, thank you for awareness. I became more and more aware, so that now I have so much more ability in my life to realize when I dissociate in life when I'm not driving. It started with while I'm driving. It's just a proposal.

Thomas: Right, right.

Participant 1: Thank you for listening.

Thomas: Thank you for sharing all of this, and I think that there is, in your sharing that we could relate to now, and that it's also precious, I think that many other people also know, one thing that I want to point out is... well, actually, two things. How we have amazing capacities to rationally explain our process, and that underneath that, usually there's a very simple fact that we are simply scared, that we are scared that we are not protected, that we are scared that we didn't get, at the beginning of our life, like the warmth or the protection to develop a no that is respected. When we as kids, as William said before, come into the face of saying no and resisting and so, for some of us, we had to support that that was welcomed and seen as a beautiful voice and development of our own voice, but for some of us, that has been confronted or hurt, or whatsoever. So when I listen to you, I immediately get the feeling, like a strong compassion for this heart that felt unprotected. I immediately get a sense of, oh, I want to become a partner in feeling that place that is scared. When the possibility of a no arises, I lose certain parts of your insight, they disappear for me, which means, for me, that you stopped feeling a part of you when you talk about the no. I think that, to find the relation in the part that had never had the support to develop the ground inside to say joyfully no, to say no with enjoying your power, that a no is fun. It's fun to say no. It's fun to have one's own space. It's fun to create one's own world.

[01:35:00]

And my invitation, I know here on the call there's not so much time to go really very deep in it, but I would be interested in what you have to say to your sense of feeling safe. From a safe insight, there's a natural flower coming up, or the trunk of the tree that can say no, because it doesn't threaten the ground. What do you have to say to this, what rings... what is the resonance in you when I say what I say?

Participant 1: After having spoken, I've now settled and calmed, and I'm in more stillness. Everything you're saying relates to my journey right now and what I'm striving for. It's being in my body in present, particularly when I speak. When I'm silent, I can be there. When I speak, I think that's the moment where I suddenly feel unprotected. As you said, unsafe. And I started out, the first couple of words when I spoke earlier, I was in my body, and then immediately, I left.

Thomas: That's right.

Participant 1: I knew that, yeah.

Thomas: It's beautiful. There is another thing, that fear, in that stage of development, is an emotion of connection.

Participant 1: Yeah. I've heard you say this. Yeah.

Thomas: That the beauty that we have, even now when we meet online, is that, for example, my nervous system and your nervous system can meet in the place that is scared. There is a bridge that we can create. There's a bridge that fear doesn't need to be managed anymore alone. Because for many of us, we learned that we have to hold our fear by ourselves, which was a very intelligent function because otherwise we would fall apart in chaos, and chaos is not the best environment for development.

The children that don't have parents that really hold them in the right way, they start to hold themselves. That becomes a strong habit because we practice this for decades, often. To allow the felt intimacy of that fear can be a shared experience, again. I think, if we can share fear, if I can feel that you're afraid, you can feel that you're afraid—in the fear, we have relation. The relation is through the fear. Emotions are the relational fabric of the world.

In the moment, we can meet in the fear, and that your nervous system can understand—because you understand this intellectually, of course, as the woman that you are today—but that fear doesn't live at the same level of development. That fear needs to feel, oh, I'm safe, so I can actually relate and I don't need to hold myself anymore.

I think that's, maybe, a very good experience to go through with somebody, I don't know with somebody, most probably a professional that can support you, because I think that in the moment the nervous system really understands that fear is relational and not separate, that's the healing. Then the base immediately develops much more grounding. Then you will feel inside how your spine will relax, how the body will relax, the shoulders, the neck. It will be a sensation as if, ah, like you just stepped into a warm bath, and the body relaxes into the warm water and can let go, and the base opens up.

That's the feeling the children get when they can come back to their parents, get embraced, relax the base, feel safe, and then, in the safety, curiosity immediately comes back. When the child feels safe, the parents are the most uninteresting part in the world, everything else is more interesting—the world, what we can explore, how we go out. If we don't feel safe, we need to run back and we need to feel safe. That movement, I think, is such an important movement in the world, and it's such an important component of many conflicts that that hasn't been established.

[01:40:00]

This is, I think, a key ingredient of many things that happen in the world as well. That's why I wanted to speak to it, because I think that's a very common issue, that our nervous systems learn to manage fear on our own, which always has a price. That's not meant by life to be like that. We can do it, but we pay a price. We can relearn it, and that's the beauty that, I think, a community and a professional work can do.

Thank you for bringing this up. Is this okay that we leave it here like this? Is this okay?

Participant 1: Yes. Wonderful, grist for the mill. Thank you. That was beautiful. I mean, one fear to another, to share the experience together is very beautiful. Thank you.

Thomas: Yeah. Great. Thank you.

Q&A: Learning the Life Dance of Yes and No

Participant 2: Thomas, William, wonderful morning and really, really, really great stuff. I made a few notes here that were important to me. One is, I think, what it comes down to is, for me in my work—I work as a healer in something called polarity therapy, it's about energy work—but regardless of the therapy, is that the desire, for me, desire is the key. I think that's what you've been speaking about. It's desire is the key and desirelessness is the way. It's an old phrase but you've put new meaning into it.

To get past some of the curve balls that we get attached to, the attachment seemingly is on, what we call, third dimension. And our desirelessness is creating space around the issue, allowing space around the issue. We do this in healing work. We help people find, create opportunities for space.

In fact, the body itself and the blood cell itself is a vessel that has a positive pole and a negative pole, and it's the creative space that creates the spark, and really, we can't have life without that space. Essentially, that's what we're doing. To be able to step into our higher consciousness, we have to create space. To create space, we have to, in other words, to put clothes in the closet, we have to... new clothes in the closet, we have to clean out the closet, or at least look at it.

Therefore, when you spoke, William spoke about the alchemical, the alchemist in this, is that to make conscious the issues that we have in our life, at least make them conscious and to say, well, this isn't the way for me, I think it's wonderful. I think, when you're at a peace conference or something like that, and you're dealing with a dictator or somebody whose family, perhaps, may have been killed or something like that, and who still hasn't worked through that, then they're still holding on to those issues. We have to be very sensitive to that about what tools that we need to create a mirror where they have choice. I really respect your process here.

The third thing that came up for me is kind of humorous thing, it was if... when someone, for instance, makes your favorite dessert, and you say no to it. It's only about all the things that are in play there, because when we say no to the dessert, and it's our favorite dessert, it's, in my case, anyway in my process, is really how am I going to—it might be full of sugar or something like that—it's like how I'm going to feel afterwards. Most of the times when I say no to desserts, I really want that dessert, but it's how my body is going to feel afterwards, after I eat that dessert, even though it's my favorite dessert.

I go back to the focus on desire, the desire for peace, the desire for the dessert, and the path work is the desirelessness. In other words, applying—yes, you're absolutely correct—seeing what our needs are, and then creating space around those needs in order to see, are those really our needs? Thank you for this morning. I enjoyed it totally. Thank you.

[01:45:00]

William:

Thank you. Thank you, Michael. Thank you, Carol. Those roots, that underlying yes to our needs or to our desires is, to me, is key, so that our no is not a no of judgment. Our no is a no—is a yes. Our no is just another way of saying yes to our core needs, to our core desires. If we can imagine that, if we can imagine that, when we're saying no, we're actually saying yes. We're saying yes to something. No is just a means of saying yes, yes to our dignity.

Then, I think, as the both of you were mentioning, that, then, allows us to give ourselves permission to say no because—I was really touched, Carol, when you said that the no was suppressed, no is not an option. If no is not an option, life is not an option, because the ultimate yes that we're saying, the roots is life itself, is the life energy. When we're saying no, we're simply saying yes to life. If we can imagine ourselves doing that, then we can give ourselves permission to say no in a constructive way that leads to life on the other side, which is the new possibility that the branch is opening up to the world, the yes to connection to the world.

But it has to go through that trunk, that trunk of strength, of power, that that's no that we need to cultivate, and that's, I think, the key. I really appreciate just, too, how difficult it is for us, because our noes have been repressed for many of us. Our noes are suppressed. We've been taught not to say no. We're afraid. It goes back to the fear. If we can liberate ourselves to say no in a loving, in a conscious way, we can liberate our power, and we can then use that power to engage with the very challenging, intense situations that we all face today in the world. It's learning that life dance of yes and no, to me, is the key to becoming the Shambhala warriors, I think, we all aspire to be.